United Nations S/PV.8089

Security Council

Seventy-second year

Provisional

8089th meeting

Tuesday, 7 November 2017, 10.20 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Cardi	(Italy)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Inchauste Jordán
	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
	France	Mrs. Gueguen
	Japan	Mr. Kawamura
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Tumysh
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Senegal	Mr. Ciss
	Sweden	Mr. Skau
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Hickey
	United States of America	Ms. Tachco
	Uruguay	Mr. Bermúdez

Agenda

The situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Letter dated 1 November 2017 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2017/922)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

17-36814 (E)

Accessible document Please recycle

The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Letter dated 1 November 2017 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2017/922)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency Mr. Valentin Inzko, High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency Mr. João Vale de Almeida, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of item two of its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2017/922, which contains the text of a letter dated 1 November 2017 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council, transmitting the fifty-second report of the High Representative for Implementation of the Peace Agreement on Bosnia and Herzegovina.

I now give the floor to Mr. Inzko.

Mr. Inzko: More than 25 years have passed since Bosnia and Herzegovina joined the United Nations in 1992, and more than two decades have elapsed since the tragic conflict came to an end in 1995. In many ways, the country has made remarkable progress since then: the State institutions provided for in annex 4 of the Peace Agreement — the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina — were established; the three armies that fought each other were unified into one; a modern and efficient tax collection system was established; and the country adopted a flag, a national anthem, common passports and very stable currency. Those are just some of the achievements.

The country is today at a crucial moment in its history, as leaders of all ethnic affiliations aspire to join the European Union (EU) and are working towards fulfilling the requirements necessary for Bosnia and Herzegovina to be granted EU candidate status. Despite those promising strides, Bosnia and Herzegovina still requires the attention of the international community. Looking at the past six months, many of the key political actors in Bosnia and Herzegovina have continued to hold maximalist positions on the concrete challenges facing the country. Those political actors have been unwilling, in most cases, to search for the compromises needed to adopt the necessary reforms.

Of course, there have been positive counterexamples to that negative trend. Bosnia and Herzegovina has taken some steps to implement the EU reform agenda and continues to work on the questionnaire of the European Commission. In addition, the country signed, in September in Trieste, a treaty establishing a transport community with the EU and five other Western Balkan countries, which will eventually open the door to infrastructure developments.

There were also some positive developments in terms of regional relations, such as the official visit to Sarajevo in September of the President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić. There were also important visits to Bosnia and Herzegovina made by Croatian officials. But the overall picture is one in which reforms have slowed down considerably. The Foreign Ministers of the European Union described the situation accurately last month when they expressed

> "regret that a divisive rhetoric rooted in the past and an early electoral agenda have slowed down the pace of reform and affected the political climate".

In addition to the current political stalemate, I want to highlight the risk of a deeper political crisis arising next year due to disagreement on the rules regulating the indirect election of delegates to one of the Houses of Parliament in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. If the Federation's House of Parliament is not formed following the next elections, it will most likely prevent the formation of the Federation's Government, as well as one chamber of the State-level Parliament. I want to call attention to that issue now, while there is still time for the parties in Parliament to address the problem before the elections in October 2018. The parties must do whatever is necessary to ensure that the elections

can take place next year and that the results are implemented without undue delays.

In addition to the possible political stalemate in the Federation that I have just described, we have also seen continued actions and statements from the representatives of Republika Srpska, questioning the future of the country and challenging the authority of State-level institutions, including the decisions of the State's highest courts. The President of Republika Srpska has called for Serb judges to withdraw from State judicial institutions and made it clear that entity institutions will not implement decisions of the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina related to the State's right to own real estate within Republika Srpska territory.

That is part of a campaign to assert that Bosnia and Herzegovina derives its sovereignty only from the entities and that it is not a real State. In practice, it involves challenging the competence of the State to deal with almost any issue, and that has led to paralysis on a number of concrete reforms needed for the country to advance on its path of Euro-Atlantic integration. For example, in October, the Republika Srpska National Assembly adopted a resolution that asserts the entity's neutrality vis-à-vis integration with NATO and attempts to redefine the position and obligations of the Republika Srpska under the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in particular under the Constitution, which is set forth in annex 4 of the Peace Agreement.

In response, I have been clear that the General Framework Agreement for Peace, including the Constitution, prevails over any act adopted by the Republika Srpska National Assembly and that foreign policy is the exclusive responsibility of the State's institutions. Furthermore, in my view — and this stands for other issues as well — decisions of Bosnia and Herzegovina's State Presidency remain valid until they are amended by subsequent acts.

In the past I have reported to the Security Council on another potential challenge to the Dayton Peace Agreement and the sovereignty of the country, namely, the decision to hold a referendum in the entity of Republika Srpska on the State's judicial institutions and the authorities of the High Representative. When that issue arose in 2015, I made it clear that such a referendum would violate annexes 4 and 10 of the Dayton Peace Agreement. At the time, the European Council also said that such a referendum would "challenge the cohesion, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina".

Yesterday, the Republika Srpska National Assembly formally took out of force the decision made in 2015 to hold that referendum — a decision that should never have been made in the first place. However, that National Assembly also adopted conclusions that pose gravely concerning issues. They again incorrectly assert that Republika Srpska is a State and that it has the right to hold referendums on matters within the clear competence of the State of Bosnia and Herzegovina. I would like to emphasize that the Republika Srpska authorities only have the right to make decisions on matters that fall under their own constitutional responsibilities — including through referendums. That is clearly not the case when it comes to the laws concerning judicial institutions at State level or decisions made by the High Representative.

Many of the problems that we see in Bosnia and Herzegovina serve to highlight a more general long-term trend of diminishing regard for the rule of law by those in authority. Those include the continued failure to implement the rulings made in 2009 by the European Court of Human Rights in the *Sejdić and Finci* and related cases. As a result, under the current system, certain groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina — such as Jews and Roma peoples — have been discriminated against for over two decades in their right to hold political office.

In the city of Mostar, citizens have been unable to elect local representatives during the past two electoral cycles because the two main political parties in the city have been unwilling to implement the Constitutional Court's decision on the electoral system. One final example: some of the cantons in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina have failed to amend their Constitutions to include guaranteeing the status of Serb peoples and the Serb language, despite a legal requirement since 2002 to do so.

All of those issues need to be addressed. Of course, problems with the rule of law go much deeper in terms of corruption in the political system, the large public sector and the provision of basic services to the public. Those deficiencies in the rule of law contribute to the large exodus of talented young people from the country, which strengthens the forces of nationalism and division.

The Dayton Peace Agreement defines Bosnia and Herzegovina as a State governed by the rule of law. I believe that we, as the international community, need to re-engage and reinvigorate our efforts more robustly in order to buttress the rule of law, including through stronger anti-corruption efforts.

In the light of the many internal challenges still present in Bosnia and Herzegovina, I believe that the international community should retain all of the instruments at its disposal to maintain stability. Bosnia and Herzegovina represents a complex political and security environment in which negative scenarios can quickly endanger the Dayton Peace Agreement and the progress achieved so far. For that reason, I am firmly convinced that there is still the necessity to maintain the EU military force on the ground with an executive mandate.

Before concluding, I want to mention one more recent positive development that I think reminds us that our efforts are not in vain in supporting Bosnia and Herzegovina and its people. Last year, politicians in Central Bosnia Canton adopted an initiative in the regional Parliament to segregate Bosniak and Croat pupils in the local high school in the town of Jajce. However, they quickly encountered determined resistance from a group of vocal students and other citizens of all nationalities. In large part because of that resistance, the planned division of the school did not move forward in September. That example reminds me of two things. First, it shows that there is a desire among citizens at the local level for social and institutional integration and for European standards to be applied in the public sphere. Secondly, it demonstrates to me that, when we are united as an international community in speaking out in support of local actors working to improve their own country, we see results.

Looking ahead, the principal challenges for the political leaders and institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina are clear. First and foremost, they include completing the actions needed to achieve the next steps in Euro-Atlantic integration. Those are the very same measures that will deliver the economic development that is so badly needed for the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Secondly, they include taking all the necessary steps to ensure that the 2018 elections can be held and that their results be implemented smoothly. And, finally, there is the rule of law. Respecting and implementing the decisions of courts and respecting the Dayton Peace Agreement are absolute preconditions for real progress.

As an international community, we cannot do any of those things on behalf of the elected leaders of Bosnia and Herzegovina, but we can speak out clearly against attempts to roll back the progress made in integrating Bosnia and Herzegovina and its peoples. And we can support all those who demonstrate a true commitment to making Bosnia and Herzegovina a stable, functional and prosperous country, irreversibly integrated into European structures.

The President: I thank Mr. Inzko for his briefing.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2017/928, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by Italy.

The Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it. I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Bolivia (Plurinational State of), China, Egypt, Ethiopia, France, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Russian Federation, Senegal, Sweden, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America and Uruguay

The President: The draft resolution received 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as resolution 2384 (2017).

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements following the voting.

Mrs. Gueguen (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina for his briefing. More than 20 years after a deadly conflict, the Dayton Peace Agreement continues to be the cornerstone of institutional stability in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Today's unanimous adoption of resolution 2384 (2017) serves to highlight that all the members of the Council share the same cardinal principles with regard to Bosnia and Herzegovina. First, it serves as a reminder of the imperative need to respect the principles and institutions set up by the Dayton Peace Agreemen; secondly, of the need to respect the aspiration of all the components of the country in favour of a European

perspective; and, thirdly, of the need to support the presence of the European Union-led peacekeeping force Althea, with an executive mandate.

The unity of the Council around those common elements sends a signal of peace that is essential for the calming of the political climate in a context that remains marked by great polarization among political stakeholders. The unity of the Council recalls the support of the international community for the independence and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which cannot be questioned by any one of its entities, as well as for respecting the choices of Bosnia and Herzegovina, insofar as they comply with international law and the framework established by the Peace Agreement. In that regard, we call on all Bosnian political actors to respect the central institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina and to refrain from any initiative that could undermine those institutions, such as the referendum project. The establishment of the rule of law is a prerequisite for a calm political debate.

We call for great vigilance with regard to any initiative likely to introduce new divisions in the country. We once again urge all parties to cooperate with the institutions mentioned in the Peace Agreement, including the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Office of the High Representative. The latter must focus its efforts on facilitating a peaceful dialogue on a daily basis between the different communities and the different entities involved.

France calls on all actors to abandon divisive rhetoric. The time has come to focus on the implementation of the economic and social reforms that constitute the common aspirations of all citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, regardless of their community of origin. That is also true for electoral reform. France calls on all political parties to enter into a serious dialogue. Otherwise, the legal framework for elections risks being flawed.

However, despite that fragility, France remains convinced that the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina is now on the path towards normalization, thanks in particular to the European perspective. Our objective for the next few years remains, without calling into question the founding principles of the Dayton Peace Agreement, to change the international presence, taking into account, in particular, the progress of Bosnia and Herzegovina on its European path. France is pleased that the European perspective is now the main driver of development and consolidation of the country. Frances aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the observer of the European Union.

In that regard, we welcome several positive developments for Bosnia and Herzegovina on the road to European integration. The official submission to the Bosnian authorities of the questionnaire to launch the European Commission's examination of Bosnia and Herzegovina's candidacy for the European Union is certainly part of those positive developments. It is part of a context in which the prospect of European integration enjoys massive support among the Bosnian population and it is the subject of real unanimity within institutions, from the Presidency to the cantons, including political entities, which is something that we can only welcome enthusiastically.

In that context, the European Union will continue more than ever to support the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the implementation of reforms that meet the economic and social aspirations of the population. The reform agenda is central to that end. We are therefore concerned about the slowdown in the reforms, which started at the beginning of the year. In the framework of the questionnaire, we will attach particular importance to demonstrating the full functionality of the coordination mechanism in the European matter.

Finally, the Althea military operation will also continue its work by adapting itself as best as it can to the security situation on the ground in order to enable the Bosnian security forces to operate autonomously. In the coming weeks, it will be the subject of a strategic review led by the European Union, which will guide its efforts for the years to come.

Twenty-one years after the horror of war, 25 years after the beginning of the conflict, Bosnia and Herzegovina is moving in the right direction today, with the support of the European Union and its other partners. The responsibility of the international community, and in particular of the Council, is to encourage it along that path, so that it definitively turn the page on quarrels of the past.

Mr. Skau (Sweden): I would like to align myself with the statement to be delivered on behalf of the European Union (EU).

Let me begin by thanking the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mr. Valentin Inzko, for

his comprehensive briefing to the Security Council this morning. I would like to assure the High Representative of our continued full support for his important work.

During the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the line from Ivo Andrić's *Letter from the Year 1920* that Bosnia was a country of fear and hatred was often quoted. However, since the end of the war, the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina, supported by the international community, not least the European Union, have been on a journey to replace that fear and hatred with trust and mutual respect. It is a journey to build a peaceful and prosperous Bosnia and Herzegovina. And while much has been achieved, it is a journey that has not yet reached its end.

Bosnia and Herzegovina's European Union perspective remains central to its future. The President of the European Commission, Mr. Jean-Claude Juncker, in his state of the union speech in September, clearly stated that the integration of the Western Balkans into the Euroepan Union remains a top priority for the EU. The Western Balkans region is a part of Europe, and developments in the region will affect the rest of the continent. European Union Foreign Ministers reiterated the Union's firm commitment to Bosnia and Herzegovina's EU perspective when they met at the Foreign Affairs Council only last month. However, much work remains to be done.

While we welcome the initial implementation of the reform agenda, the pace of reform has, worryingly, slowed this year. It is crucial that authorities step up the implementation of comprehensive reforms in order to regain momentum and to get the reform agenda back on track. Those efforts should focus on socioeconomic development, fighting corruption and organized crime, ensuring fundamental freedoms and electoral reforms. In addition, it is necessary to invest in bridging cultural and social differences, not least among children and youth. Next year's elections must not be an excuse for delaying key decisions. Election reform should be approached in the spirit of consensus and dialogue. Moreover, relevant rulings of the Constitutional Court must be implemented swiftly in order to avoid a legal vacuum after the elections next year.

It is important that efforts towards continued reconciliation in Bosnia and Herzegovina be supported. Sexual and gender-based violence committed during the war needs to be addressed. Impunity threatens stability and social cohesion, making reconciliation even more difficult. In addition, Bosnia and Herzegovina's national action plan on women and peace and security should be fully implemented.

Finally, we welcome today's unanimous adoption of resolution 2384 (2017), which reviews the mandate of the European Union-led peacekeeping force Althea in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We also acknowledge the need for discussion on the reconfiguration of the international presence in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We remain supportive of the idea of phasing out the international presence when the situation on the ground allows for it. With our partners in the European Union, Sweden will continue to stand with the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina as they work towards realizing their European perspective and building a country of prosperity, peace, stability and equality for all.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. Valentin Inzko, High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, for his comprehensive briefing on his latest report on the implementation of the Peace Agreement on Bosnia and Herzegovina (S/2017/922, annex). Egypt stresses its full support for the mandate of the High Representative and his efforts to assist Bosnian authorities to overcome the challenges.

Egypt welcomes all efforts to maintain stability in Bosnia and Herzegovina and its unity, with all its ethnic and cultural components. We are cognizant of the important role played by the European Union (EU)-led stabilization force in achieving that objective. Accordingly, we welcome the unanimous adoption of resolution 2384 (2017) today. That sends a strong message from the international community to the Bosnian people that we are committed to maintaining stability and security in Bosnia and Herzegovina and that we are committed to providing the necessary support to country to anchor its sovereignty, unity and territorial Integrity.

Two decades after its signing, the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina remains the cornerstone for institutional stability and sustainable peace. We express our deep concern about the great challenges to the Peace Agreement referred to in the report during the reporting period, especially resorting to inflammatory and divisive rhetoric. We call upon all political leaders to give precedence to the political interests of the Bosnian people over any other considerations. We call upon

them to rise above narrow political and ethnic interests that undermine any progress and stability. We call upon them to engage in serious political consultations to discuss the proposed amendments to the election law in Bosnia, which would prevent a potential political crisis.

Those events coincide with what the report referred to as limited progress towards the implementation of the 5+2 plan to close the Office of the High Representative, especially regarding the registration of defence property in addition to the rejection by the Serbian entity to increase the budget allocated to State institutions, which adversely affects the sustainability of financial policies. Egypt stresses its full support to the Office of the High Representative with respect to what was provided for in the Dayton Peace Agreement and the relevant Security Council resolutions. We call upon the High Representative to intensify his efforts to implement the plan in full.

In conclusion, Egypt stresses the importance of respecting the unity, stability and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the respect of its national Constitution and of all decisions and verdicts of the judiciary by all parties to solidify stability. Egypt welcomes the recent positive developments, especially the improved relations with neighbouring countries and the improvement of some of the economic indicators. We call upon the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina to strengthen social cohesion and political consensus to move forward with peace efforts and reforms. In addition, we call upon the international community to continue its efforts to support Bosnia and Herzegovina, which would have a positive effect not only on the stability of Bosnia and Herzegovina but on the stability of the entire region of the Balkans.

Mr. Hickey (United Kingdom): I thank Mr. Inzko for his report (S/2017/922, annex) and his briefing. He has the full and continuous support of the United Kingdom.

I want to begin by warmly welcoming the unanimous adoption of resolution 2384 (2017) this morning. I pay tribute to you, Mr. President, and to your delegation for your excellent efforts as penholder. This adoption is a welcome show of the Security Council's continued support for the vital work of the European Union (EU)-led peacekeeping force Althea and a clear sign of our commitment to Bosnia and Herzegovina's stability, security and territorial integrity. It is a commitment that we now look to the Bosnian authorities to match. They must do so in word and deed as they undertake the vital reforms necessary to bring about the social and economic renewal that the country needs, and which is so essential to Bosnia's future within the European Union.

Bosnia and Herzegovina made good progress towards that goal in 2016, and the delivery of the EU questionnaire in December was recognition of that fact. However the promise and potential of 2016 has not materialized this year. Instead, this year has seen the pace of reform slowing markedly, and divisive rhetoric and premature electioneering only increasing. It is those negative trends that are now dominating the political landscape, despite the elections being over 10 months away. When that sort of narrow-minded, divisive electioneering takes hold, nobody gains. All Bosnians lose out. We need only look to the tens of millions of dollars in funding from the International Monetary Fund that are currently on hold. Bosnia and Herzegovina has failed to fulfil its responsibilities; if it had done so, that funding would be released. The money could be used to make considerable progress on the reform path. It would transform Bosnia for the better — building roads and other vital infrastructure that would benefit all. Let us all encourage the Bosnian authorities to refocus on the reform agenda to deliver socioeconomic reforms that would improve the lives of their citizens. Divisive, backwards-looking rhetoric only distracts from that essential work, and will only slow the country's progress.

As a long-standing friend of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the United Kingdom calls on all the parties to stop looking to the past and instead look forward to a shared future. If they do so, they will have the United Kingdom's support. We stand ready to work with the authorities to make progress on those critically important issues.

As the High Representative said just now, a crucial element of that effort must be to promote and uphold the rule of law, including through a well-functioning independent judiciary. We call on all political and judicial leaders to avoid actions that undermine the standards of judicial impartiality and integrity.

Ahead of next year's elections, we also urge all parties to approach the issue of electoral reform through dialogue and to show willingness to reach a compromise. The authorities must work towards the implementation of judgements handed down by the European Court of Human Rights. No one should be excluded from

political office at any level of Government based on their ethnicity or residence.

I would like to reiterate today the need for the Bosnian authorities to find a resolution to the long-standing impasse concerning local elections in Mostar. It is absolutely extraordinary that the citizens of Mostar have now been denied their democratic rights for nearly a decade. That cannot continue, and Mostar must remain a single, coherent multi-ethnic unit of local self-government.

Before I conclude, I would like to express the United Kingdom's support for reform, not just as a means of generating prosperity for Bosnia and Herzegovina, but also as a means of ensuring security for the country through Euro-Atlantic integration. In order to make progress towards that goal, it is vital that Bosnia and Herzegovina undertake further efforts on registering defence property, which is needed for the activation of the NATO membership action plan and for progress on the 5+2 agenda. But until that agenda is completed, we remain committed to the continuing role of the High Representative and his Office. The Office of the High Representative remains the final authority in-theatre with regard to the civilian implementation of the Peace Agreement. That includes supporting the use of Bonn powers if the situation requires it.

Therefore, both Operation Althea and the High Representative have a vital role to play in Bosnia and Herzegovina until stability and security are firmly entrenched. That day is not yet here, and it is therefore essential that the Security Council continue its support for both until that moment arrives.

Mr. Kawamura (Japan): I thank High Representative Inzko for his informative briefing. Japan continues to appreciate Mr. Inzko's important role in supporting peace and stability in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We also welcome the unanimous adoption of an extended mandate for the European Union-led peacekeeping force, which plays a pivotal role in maintaining peace in the country.

All ethnic groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina share a common position on joining the European Union (EU). Japan strongly supports the Government's efforts in the country's accession process towards membership in the EU and NATO. We welcome progress on regional cooperation, which can be seen in the signing of the EU transport community treaty in September. Japan calls for further accelerated efforts on the country's EU candidacy through the submission of answers to the European Commission's questionnaire by the end of the year.

We note, however, that the Government's efforts on economic reforms have not been sufficient. We hope to see progress in efforts on a fuel-tax bill, including addressing the serious unemployment situation, especially for young people, and measures to create an environment conducive to foreign investment. In that regard, at the Japan-Bosnia Herzegovina Foreign Ministers meeting on 1 October in Tokyo, Foreign Minister Kono of Japan particularly stressed the importance of improving the investment environment.

Next October's elections and campaigns provide a prime opportunity to solidify national unity and inclusiveness among different ethnic groups, and they should in no way be an occasion for ethnically based actions and rhetoric. Japan strongly hopes that electoral reform will move forward based on consensus and inclusivity among ethnic groups in order for fair elections to be held on schedule.

As I did in our previous debate (see S/PV.7943), I unfortunately must reiterate Japan's deep disappointment over a number of ethnically divisive developments in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We are particularly concerned by actions, such as the Republika Srpska National Assembly's adoption of a resolution on the protection of the constitutional order and on the military neutrality of the Republika Srpska, which have a negative impact on Bosnia and Herzegovina's sovereignty and territorial integrity. We also emphasize that actions by Republika Srpska's leaders to undermine the authority of the High Representative are not only politically unacceptable, but they are also violations of the Dayton Agreement. The international community must continue to convince the leaders of the Republika Srpska that containing nationalism and separatism are crucial for people's peace and prosperity. The High Representative and his Office, the Peace Implementation Council and the Security Council all have important responsibilities and roles to play in this area.

Since the end of the conflict, Japan has provided over $500 million to support Bosnia and Herzegovina, both now and into the future. Recent efforts include demining, agricultural development in Srebrenica, the installation of a flue-gas desulphurization plant to fight pollution in Republika Srpska, the development of shared health- and physical-education curriculums for

all ethnic groups, and support for children of different ethnic backgrounds to learn sports together in Mostar.

While December will be Japan's final month on the Security Council during its current term, it will remain a core member of the Peace Implementation Council. We will continue to contribute to reconciliation, acting as a neutral party among ethnic groups, while fully supporting Mr. Inzko and his Office.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank High Representative Inzko for his briefing.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is an important country in the Balkans. To maintain its peace and stability, promote economic and social development and achieve harmonious coexistence among the various ethnic groups is in the common interests of the countries of the region and of the international community.

On the Bosnia and Herzegovina issue, the international community should listen to the views of all relevant parties, take a balanced and prudent approach and hear the concerns of all interested parties. China respects the independence, sovereignty, national unity and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina, respects the choice of the Bosnian people in determining their future, and supports Bosnian people of all ethnicities in achieving harmonious coexistence and common development.

China welcomes the efforts of Bosnia and Herzegovina aimed a promoting national reconciliation, encouraging economic and social development and strengthening the rule of law. We hope that Bosnian people of all ethnicities will work actively to consolidate the political and social progress achieved, engage in dialogue and consultation to settle differences, completely implement the Dayton Peace Agreement and continue to strive for greater progress in all areas so that they can all share in the peace dividend.

China welcomes the efforts of High Representative Inzko aimed at promoting the political process in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We hope that, in accordance with his mandate, he will play a constructive role in promoting the implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement.

China welcomes the Security Council's adoption of resolution 2384 (2017) to renew the mandate of the European Union-led peacekeeping force (EUFOR) Althea operation. We hope that EUFOR will continue to maintain close cooperation with Bosnia and Herzegovina and play a constructive role in safeguarding its peace and stability. China stands ready to work with the international community in order to continue to contribute to the achievement of lasting peace and stability and development in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Ms. Guadey (Ethiopia): I would like to begin by thanking Mr. Valentin Inzko, High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, for his comprehensive briefing on the latest report (see S/2017/922, annex) on the implementation of the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We welcome the unanimous adoption of resolution 2384 (2017), renewing the mandate of the European Union-led peacekeeping force (EUFOR) Althea operation, and we are grateful to Italy for its role as penholder in facilitating the negotiation of the draft resolution.

We would like to once again affirm our support for Bosnia and Herzegovina's sovereignty, territorial integrity and unity. We take note of the positive developments, such as the signing of a transport community treaty with the European Union and five other Western Balkan countries, as indicated in the report of the High Representative. We believe that such progress will help to promote the stability and prosperity of the country and the region at large. We also take note of the continuing exchanges of visits by high-level officials and political leaders of the countries in the region, which we believe will strengthen good-neighbourly relations and enhance cooperation in the Western Balkans.

We are nevertheless concerned about some of the reported developments undermining Bosnia and Herzegovina's political stability, particularly the divisive rhetoric and actions that continue to challenge the constitutional order and integrity of the country's judiciary at the State level. In that regard, we call on all authorities and political leaders to fully respect the decision of the Constitutional Court. Respect for the rule of law and the authority of State institutions established under the Dayton Agreement is fundamental to the State-building process, and it is therefore vital that all parties refrain from any provocative statements and actions that could undermine Bosnia and Herzegovina's sovereignty, territorial integrity, cohesion and constitutional order.

We also take note of the disagreement over changes to the electoral law in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We believe that the issue must be handled very carefully, since it has the potential to affect the formation of a

Government after the next election cycle and undermine the country's institutional continuity and stability. It is our hope that the ruling of the Constitutional Court after its review of the country's election law will be implemented in a manner consistent with the provisions of the Dayton Agreement. We also encourage the parties to engage in serious political dialogue to address their differences over the electoral reform issue, which would be particularly appropriate in the light of the upcoming general elections in 2018.

In conclusion, we would like to express our support to the High Representative and his office in carrying out their mandate to monitor the implementation of the civilian aspects of the Dayton Agreement. We call on all the parties to extend the cooperation essential to the work of the High Representative. We also recognize the vital role played by the European Union's military mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina, EUFOR Althea, in maintaining the safety and stability of the country.

Mr. Ciss (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): I too would like to thank Mr. Valentin Inzko, High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, for the very detailed report (see S/2017/922, annex) he has just presented to us, and, on behalf of Senegal, to hail the Security Council's unanimous adoption of resolution 2384 (2017), which extends the mandate of the European Union-led peacekeeping force Althea operation for a further 12 months. My delegation would also like to express its appreciation to the Italian presidency for convening this meeting and giving us an opportunity to discuss the High Representative's report. We would like to make some comments on its political, economic and institutional aspects.

On the political front, despite various ongoing problems, progress has definitely been made with the adoption by the presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina's of its defence review document and its integration into NATO, as well as the official signing of the Protocol on the adaptation of the Stabilization and Association Agreement with the European Union, and the conclusion of a transport community treaty with the European Union.

Despite those positive steps, it must be said that the General Framework Agreement for Peace has been undermined by the activities of the Republika Srpska in particular, which has attempted to interfere with the Constitutional Court's ruling that the results of the referendum of 25 December 2016 were unconstitutional. My delegation affirms its support to respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as guaranteed by the Dayton Agreement, by Bosnia and Herzegovina's constitution and international law. We believe that such developments represent a challenge to the constitution of a country that is in need of the exact opposite — a calm atmosphere and frank dialogue with the entire community with strict regard for the Constitution and the law. In that regard, Senegal also urges all the parties to engage in political dialogue and make good-faith efforts to ensure that the 2018 elections are conducted under good conditions.

With regard to the economy, Senegal commends Bosnia and Herzegovina's progress, while emphasizing that it must be consolidated and built on in order to foster harmonious development, stability and the well-being of the people. We therefore encourage all three ethnic groups to work more closely together and to pursue their shared desire for coexistence, the test of a stable, strong and peaceful State that participates fully in the community of nations.

We also affirm our support for the High Representative and call on all the parties to cooperate with him. As his report makes abundantly clear, the presence of the European Union-led military mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with its executive mandate, is as important as ever insofar as it enables the High Representative and other international players to implement their respective mandates and ensure the safety and security of every ethnic group in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Turning to the issue of the fight against terrorism, which is one of the problems facing Bosnia and Herzegovina, particularly in a situation featuring the problems of foreign terrorist fighters and complex flows of migrants, which continue to add to the challenges to the security of the country and the entire region. Needless to say, it will be impossible to achieve concrete results in the fight against terrorism without strengthening the necessary cooperation at every level between the authorities of the various area of the country. In our view, the international community must continue to support Bosnia and Herzegovina's efforts in order to help it show greater resilience in dealing with its ongoing socioeconomic problems. The same is true with regard to strengthening its defence and security forces so that they will eventually be able to

overcome their operational and strategic deficiencies in a situation where the threat of terror continues.

In conclusion, I would like to once again encourage the international community, and the Security Council in particular, to continue to engage and cooperate on the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina in order to ensure that it can continue to move forward, as it has for more than 20 years.

Mr. Safronkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We would like to share our thoughts with you, Mr. President, on the report of the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina (see S/2017/922, annex). In our opinion, of all the reports Mr. Inzko has submitted to the Security Council since 2009, this is the most biased. To a lesser extent, the document refers to the implementation of the General Framework Agreement, but essentially it forms part of the tendentious and biased attacks on the Republika Srpska that a number of delegations in this Chamber have unfortunately already seized on. There is only one thing to be gleaned from the report, which is that the Bosnian Serbs alone are to blame for all of Bosnia and Herzegovina's problems. It is clear to anyone even slightly familiar with the situation in Bosnia that the picture painted by the High Representative is a long way from the truth and very misleading, and testifies to the fact that its author has lost touch with reality.

We are deeply disturbed to see that Mr. Inzko has entered the realm of blatant Serbophobia and that his daily activity has been reduced to improving his relations with Banja Luka and lobbying for Euro-Atlantic integration for Bosnia and Herzegovina, in contravention both of his mandate and internal political realities in the host country. I will say straight out that we should not be engaging in hostilities but carrying out our duties conscientiously. That approach requires fostering national reconciliation processes, mutually respectful internal political dialogue, compromise and consensus and, of course, respectful consideration of the views of all the parties. Mr. Inzko should bear in mind that in Bosnia and Herzegovina he represents the entire international community, not the individual members of his own choosing. He has to conduct agreed-on policy, not carry out somebody's individual instructions or be guided by personal hostility.

However, let us get to grips with the reality of the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, whose main feature is a deep internal political crisis at both the Bosnian level and in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, founded on the absence of any equal or mutually respectful dialogue among the three constituent peoples. Strangely enough, the High Representative failed to underscore that in his report. It is exactly that absence of genuine inter-ethnic interaction that is creating problems in the functioning of Government bodies, hindering the process of implementing essential socioeconomic reforms — including, incidentally, the European agenda — and compelling local ethnic communities to undertake additional efforts to establish and protect the equality and broad autonomy guaranteed by the Dayton Agreement.

The Peace Agreement signed in Paris in 1995 contains a fully functioning set of rules and conditions for the functioning of Bosnia and Herzegovina that has no need of outside interference. Every decision should be the result of internal political dialogue and consensus. That applies to one of the current priority issues, the reform of the electoral laws, which should be based on respect for one of the key Dayton provisions, equality for all peoples. That same principle should also be observed in the Bosnia and Herzegovina justice system, about whose fairness, independence, impartiality and effectiveness many serious questions have been raised, one revealing example being the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina's recent decision in the case of the Bosniak commander Naser Orić during the Yugoslavian conflict. It is surprising that in his report Mr. Inzko decided not to dwell on issues that are matters of such urgency for the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, who are clearly losing faith in justice. He completely fails to mention the systemic problems in the special services at the Bosnian level, which are giving two of the constituent peoples reason for concerns about their independence from political pressure, their impartiality and their due national representativeness.

We do not agree with Mr. Inzko's theme of blaming the Bosnian Serb leadership for undermining Dayton. In its alternative report to the Security Council, the Republika Srpska clearly and unequivocally articulated its commitment to Dayton and the integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina, presenting a well-reasoned position on the country's key issues that differs from that of the High Representative. We recommend that Council members not dismiss this document but rather read it carefully, especially since it was circulated in New York in advance of the meeting, in contrast to the report of the High Representative.

This issue also applies to the High Representative's reaction to the Republika Srpska National Assembly's adoption on 17 October of a resolution on military neutrality, which far exceeded the comments from NATO headquarters in Sarajevo. We do not see why the highest representative body of that entity cannot democratically inform the Bosnian federal authorities of its position on a very painful issue for Bosnian Serbs that is also one of the most hotly debated questions in Bosnia and Herzegovina — its rapprochement with NATO. It should not be ignored.

In the light of all of this, one thing is clear. The external protection mechanism, in the person of the High Representative, has outlived its usefulness. It is not playing a positive role in the settlement process but is rather introducing unnecessary tension and engaging in matters unrelated to his mandate under the pretext of advancing Euro-Atlantic integration. We propose considering the practical aspects of shutting down the Office of the High Representative, including taking into account the 5+2 programme. That proposal was approved in 2008, but the Office continues to function. Major steps to reduce its budget and staff are clearly required.

We should be focusing on the future agenda for Bosnia and Herzegovina rather than on protectorate forms of influence. That focus should be on an unconditional transfer of all responsibility, without any exceptions, to the local authorities. That should include the judiciary, where there are still three foreign judges presiding over the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which calls the sovereignty of the country into question; promoting an equitable and mutually respectful internal political dialogue, as the only possible path to genuine national reconciliation; ensuring that international presences refrain from interfering in local affairs, as happened in the recent decision of the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council on vetting judicial officials; and rejecting unilateral sanctions as a tool for putting pressure on objectionable individuals, which only increases tension. Those are the things that the Security Council should be discussing.

Russia has traditionally maintained friendly relations with all the peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Balkans generally. The region should be a platform for collaboration and constructive cooperation on goals that unite us all, such as strengthening peace, security and stability in the country and region, and which are becoming increasingly urgent, especially in the light of the terrorist threat in Europe.

In conclusion, we would once again like to express our gratitude to the authorities, political stakeholders and civic organizations of the Republika Srpska for their unveiling of a memorial to Vitaly Ivanovich Churkin, who, first as Special Representative of the Russian President and then as Permanent Representative of Russia to the United Nations, made a tremendous contribution to the stabilization of the situation in the region.

Mr. Inchauste Jordán (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): Bolivia welcomes the report (see S/2017/922, annex) presented by Mr. Valentin Inzko, High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the Security Council's unanimous adoption of resolution 2384 (2017). The Council's support for the extension of the European Union-led peacekeeping force Althea operation shows its willingness to defend security and stability in Bosnia and Herzegovina and respect its sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, as well as its support for the Dayton Agreement. We hope that Althea will continue to cooperate closely with Bosnia and Herzegovina and to play a constructive role in maintaining peace and stability in the country within the framework of its mandate.

We also commend the positive political developments in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the reporting period, particularly, the steps taken to implement the reform agenda and the signing of a transport community treaty by Bosnia and Herzegovina, the European Union and five other Balkan countries. Those efforts are a testimony to the commitment of the Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina to continuing to undertake the reforms needed to foster stability and contribute to initiatives aimed at achieving the development and stability the country wants. In that regard, we urge the authorities to focus on those aspects and to intensify their efforts to implement the 5+2 agenda, which is a prerequisite for the closure of the Office of the High Representative.

While we also welcome the progress that Bosnia and Herzegovina has made with economic development, we are concerned about the continuing challenges on the political front, which represent a major threat to Bosnia and Herzegovina's territorial integrity and sovereignty whose repercussions could put not just the country but the entire region of the Balkans at risk. In that regard, we encourage all the country's political

leaders to put the interests of the Bosnian people before their own ethnic political concerns. We appeal to all those leaders to deal with these challenges in a spirit of consensus and in an atmosphere of inclusion in which all Bosnian political parties are full participants, in line with the Dayton Peace Agreement, which remains the legal basis and benchmark for stability and the peaceful resolution of disputes between the parties in their quest for lasting peace. In that regard, we should emphasize the importance of ensuring that all the parties respect Bosnia and Herzegovina's sovereignty, territorial integrity and Constitution, as well as the decisions handed down by its judiciary with regard to the rule of law. We also urge political leaders and all parties to refrain from engaging in divisive nationalist rhetoric.

Lastly, we reiterate our support to all the peoples of Bosnian and Herzegovina in living together in harmony for their shared development. We call on the international community to heed the concerns of all the parties concerned by taking a neutral, fair approach with a view to leaving the divisions of the past behind.

Mr. Bermúdez (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would first like to thank Mr. Valentin Inzko, High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, for his briefing today and for his most recent report *(see S/2017/922, annex)* to the Council. We also thank the Italian presidency of the Security Council for convening today's debate.

We welcome the Council's adoption today of resolution 2384 (2017), renewing the mandate of the European Union-led peacekeeping force (EUFOR) Althea in Bosnia and Herzegovina for another year. We appreciate the work that the Office of the High Representative is doing on the ground to promote the implementation of the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the efforts of EUFOR Althea to ensure the country's political and social stability. The international community must continue to support the process of consolidating the Dayton Agreement.

As we have often said, Uruguay is a firm believer in strict respect for the principle of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. Today, in that spirit, we reaffirm our support for Bosnia and Herzegovina's unity, territorial integrity and sovereignty. Respect for State institutions and for the rule of law represents the path to achieving a stable Bosnia and Herzegovina whose constituent communities can live side by side in peace. In that regard, Uruguay considers the rule of law and the authority of the institutions established under the 1995 General Framework Agreement for Peace to be crucial, and respect for them the road to stability and peaceful coexistence for Bosnia and Herzegovina. Bosnia and Herzegovina's political stakeholders must act responsibly and participate in a constructive dialogue that will enable them to overcome their differences, focusing on national reconciliation and on achieving the shared goals that can make Bosnia and Herzegovina strong and prosperous. Ensuring stability and development for Bosnia and Herzegovina and peaceful coexistence among all of its ethnic groups will benefit the international community generally and the region in particular.

I would like to make a few comments on some aspects of the High Representative's report and recent events. As the previous report did, it indicates that the Bosnia and Herzegovina authorities have made only limited progress towards meeting the requirements of the five objectives and the two conditions established by the Steering Board of the Peace Implementation Council as a prerequisite for the closure of the Office of the High Representative. It is therefore essential to underscore the importance of working to make headway on full compliance with the 5+2 agenda. Despite the lack of progress in some areas, we should also emphasize that Bosnia and Herzegovina has taken some measures aimed at implementing its reform programme, which is a positive step, making progress in carrying out the July 2015 reform agenda, which focuses on socioeconomic issues that directly affect citizens, and taking some steps towards integration with the European Union. However, there is still much work to be done to strengthen the rule of law and improve the country's overall political climate.

It will also be essential to tackle these reforms before the start of the election campaign scheduled for October 2018. The parties concerned in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the international community must all support every effort to promote peace and stability in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In that regard, Uruguay reiterates its desire to see a stable, sovereign Bosnia and Herzegovina where all of its citizens can live in peace and work for the common good.

Mr. Tumysh (Kazakhstan): My delegation welcomes the Council's renewal of the mandate of the European Union-led peacekeeping force (EUFOR)

Althea in Bosnia and Herzegovina for another year, and would also like to thank High Representative Valentin Inzko for his update.

While the transition process is still ongoing, some progress has been made in Bosnia and Herzegovina in terms of building strong State institutions, inclusive dialogue and democratic procedures, as well as in working towards progress and an impartial judiciary. The focus must also remain on the economy, as it will be important to attract foreign direct investment and create jobs and to formulate common strategies for energy, agriculture and employment. Kazakhstan therefore welcomes Bosnia and Herzegovina's signing of a transport community treaty with the European Union (EU) and five other States of the Western Balkans, which opens up major opportunities for the security-development nexus in, for example, the infrastructure and transport sectors, and for doing business with large regional and international partners and stakeholders and moving consistently towards integration in the EU.

We believe that for socioeconomic reforms to be successfully implemented, Bosnia and Herzegovina's strategic development depends directly on the political climate and on guarantees of peace and stability. In that regard, I should add that the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity should never be challenged. The country is preparing for the main elections in October 2018, and all parties must focus their efforts on continuing a political dialogue to discuss potential amendments to the election laws, with further adoptions on agreed dates. We call on the leaders of all the parties concerned to implement the General Framework Agreement for Peace and observe all provisions and procedures that are integral to that settlement, including the rulings of the Constitutional Court.

We welcomed the political will shown by the Serbian leaders who visited Sarajevo in September. We also believe that direct contact with the leadership in neighbouring States is the most effective way to promote dialogue and trust between the parties. As a general principle, my delegation welcomes the positive ongoing dialogue between the Governments of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, with regular high-level contacts, and encourages the parties to continue.

On other fronts, efforts must also be focused on converting defence properties into State and civilian structures, ensuring greater fiscal responsibility and sustainability, strengthening the Parliamentary Assembly and developing media and broadcasting communications.

The country needs further support in improving its energy system and infrastructure, foreign trade, economic relations and other areas of social and economic development. The issue of returning and resettling refugees and displaced persons will also have to be addressed. Most of all, the engagement of civil-society organizations and grassroots movements, and the participation of women, young people and representatives of other vulnerable groups, will also be critical to swiftly achieving social harmony and building intercommunal trust and confidence.

Finally, the noble task facing Bosnia and Herzegovina is that of improving the daily lives of citizens and promote reconciliation. We believe that the progress achieved on the European Union integration track will be a catalyst for reconciliation and help to resolve long-standing issues and address the various reforms.

Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine): Ukraine aligns itself with the statement to be delivered later today on behalf of the European Union (EU).

I thank High Representative Valentin Inzko for his briefing and report (see S/2017/922, annex), which is as objective as usual. I also reiterate Ukraine's full and continued support for his efforts to assist the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina in overcoming the challenges they face, including implementing the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The role of the High Representative, while always pivotal, will be particularly important next year, in view of the upcoming 2018 general elections. Ukraine would like to take this opportunity to call on the Government of the Republika Srpska to resume its cooperation with the High Representative and refrain from intimidating his team.

Ukraine welcomes the Security Council's unanimous adoption today of resolution 2384 (2017). The Council's united position sends a strong message of support to the people and leaders of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as for the activities of the European Union-led peacekeeping force Althea. Today's resolution also represents a united call on Bosnia and Herzegovina to step up its efforts to complete the 5+2 agenda, refrain from polarizing policies and rhetoric and continue to work to implement comprehensive reforms. In our view, along with further actions aimed at European and

Euro-Atlantic integration, those steps will contribute to building a stable and prosperous country for the benefit of all its citizens.

Ukraine looks forward to the day when Bosnia and Herzegovina becomes a fully fledged member of the European Union. We welcome the progress that has been made in that direction with the signing in September of a transport community treaty with the EU and five other Western Balkans countries, as well as the ongoing work on compiling answers to the European Commission's questionnaire. Given the existing support of the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina for European integration, we sincerely believe that this foreign-policy objective could unite both entities.

We echo the concerns of the High Representative about some irresponsible decisions by the Republika Srpska National Assembly, even if some of them have recently been reversed. On a positive note, we are glad that the threat of holding a referendum on the status of the Republika Srpska has reportedly been taken off the table for the time being. I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate Ukraine's full support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and to underscore that its entities have no right to secede. Ukraine strongly supports the position of the High Representative on the resolution on the protection of the constitutional order and assuring the military neutrality of the Republika Srpska, adopted by the Republika Srpska National Assembly in October. We are also concerned about the possibility that this resolution would, in effect, favour a division of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and we cannot support attempts to undermine the General Framework Agreement and Bosnia and Herzegovina's constitutional order.

Next year will be a very challenging one for Bosnia and Herzegovina. Preparations for the upcoming 2018 general elections have already started a full year ahead, with very divisive actions and rhetoric. Despite the existing problems related to indirect elections, the parties in the State Parliament have not yet begun a serious political dialogue to discuss potential amendments to the election law addressing that issue. Other potential or actual problems include the rejection of the authority of the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina and its Office of the Prosecutor in the Republika Srpska and the continued attempts by its authorities to make decisions on foreign policy, as well as many others. If those challenges are not addressed in a comprehensive and consensual way, with the participation of all sides, the political gains made since the conclusion of the Dayton Agreement will be undermined.

I therefore call on the political leaders of all sides to refrain from divisive rhetoric and to concentrate on the real issues, where progress is so desperately needed. It particular, it will be vital to continue efforts to implement the reform agenda, which include social, economic, rule-of-law and public-administration reforms. It will also be important to show progress in the functioning of the judiciary, in combating corruption and organized crime and in countering radicalization and terrorism. As we enter the third decade of the peace process, the Council has an obligation to provide all the necessary political support to ensure further peace and development in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is crucial to ensure that any attempts to encroach on Bosnia and Herzegovina's independence, unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity are resolutely addressed and prevented.

Ms. Tachco (United States of America): I would like to thank High Representative Inzko for his update on Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Office of the High Representative has played a critical role for more than 22 years in helping Bosnia and Herzegovina move towards peace and prosperity and promoting the security and stability of the region. I would like to thank the High Representative sincerely for his great service and excellent and impartial reporting, and to convey our continuing support for his Office's mandate, as the final authority for interpreting the civilian implementation of the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We welcome the language in resolution 2384 (2017), adopted today, reaffirming his mandate. His role continues to be pivotal, especially as Bosnia and Herzegovina looks towards general elections in 2018 and contends with political divisiveness that threatens to undermine the gains made under the Agreement.

The continuing challenges highlighted in the most recent report of the High Representative for Implementation of the Peace Agreement on Bosnia and Herzegovina (see S/2017/922, annex) underscore that the Council must remain vigilant in the face of those who seek to weaken the constitutional order of the single State of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The United States remains dedicated to upholding the Dayton Peace Accords, respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina and promoting its continued European and Euro-Atlantic integration.

We commend the continued work of the European Union-led peacekeeping force Althea and NATO in promoting security and capacity-building in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We fully support the renewal of Althea's mandate and the important mentorship role that NATO headquarters in Sarajevo plays in helping to implement the defence review and modernization plans.

The United States urges for continued progress towards integration with both NATO and the European Union (EU). It will require vision and political will. It will also require real follow-through on commitments, such as defence property registrations and full and timely completion of the EU questionnaire. We urge all parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina to stay focused on the much-needed reforms, including on the political, socioeconomic and electoral fronts. The Government must work to enhance the rule of law, tackle corruption and improve the overall political climate in the country for the benefit of all citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Tackling such reforms now, before the 2018 election cycle, is critical. Bosnia and Herzegovina's leaders must do everything possible to ensure that the electoral code complies with the relevant rulings of both the European Court of Human Rights and the Constitutional Court.

In advance of next year's election, we also urge all parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina to avoid divisive rhetoric that hardens political differences and exacerbates ethnic divisions. We share many of the concerns raised by the High Representative about the actions of anyone who seeks to erode State-level institutions, whether by ignoring the decisions of the Constitutional Court or by acting outside the established decision-making process. United States sanctions against Republika Srpska President Milorad Dodik should serve as a warning to those who seek to undermine the stability of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Council should remain united behind the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Bosnia and Herzegovina, its two entities and three constituent peoples. Likewise, it should support those who seek to protect the State Constitution and the tenets of the Dayton Peace Accords.

Once again, we look forward to the day when Bosnia and Herzegovina meets the objectives and conditions established by the Peace Implementation Council for the closure of the Office of the High Representative. We look forward to a time when we can say with absolute confidence that Bosnia and Herzegovina has fully implemented the Peace Agreement and is now a "peaceful, viable State, irreversibly on course for European integration". But that day has not yet arrived. We encourage Bosnia and Herzegovina's leaders and all members of the international community to support the actions and reforms needed to reach that milestone. Until that time, the international community must deliver on its commitments to the Office of the High Representative to help ensure that it fulfils its mandate.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as representative of Italy.

I thank the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mr. Valentin Inzko, for his briefing and his work.

Italy also aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the observer of the European Union.

Today, the Security Council unanimously renewed not only its support for the European Union-led peacekeeping force (EUFOR) Althea, but also its appeal to Bosnia and Herzegovina to speed up the pace of reforms, in line with European integration perspective. Italy firmly supports the European Union (EU) path chosen by Bosnia and Herzegovina and will continue to assist the country in achieving that goal. Important progress has been made thus far, demonstrating the commitment of all parties to reach that common goal. Authorities at all institutional levels have been working on the European Union Commission opinion questionnaire this year, which is the first step towards achieving the status of candidate member of the European Union. We encourage them to redouble their efforts so as to ensure coordinated and harmonized answers to the questionnaire.

We regret that the pace of social and economic reforms has been slowing down rather than accelerating over the past several months. The demands of all citizens for a better future deserve to be met, and urgently. The leaders of the country have already showed their ability to deliver when working together in the best interest of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Devisive actions and rhetoric rooted in the past are not serving that interest. On the countrary, they are stalling a reform process that had an encouraging start.

Regaining momentum in the implementation of the reform agenda is needed now more than ever to unblock the assistance of the International Monetary Fund and the European Union, which remains crucial to shoring up the process and to substantially improving the lives of all the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina. That

being the main priority, we call on all parties to discuss seriously and in a spirit of dialogue and consensus the measures needed to improve the electoral framework pursuant to the ruling issued by the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina in December 2016. It is paramount that next next year's election be conducted smoothly and allow the formation of renewed democratic bodies able to resume the reform process effectively and immediately and to steadily move towards the European Union.

Many challenges still lie ahead — strengthening the rule of law justice, the fight against corruption and the prevention of radicalization being some of the most significant — but through political will and unity of intent, they can be addressed successfully. Citizens' trust in institutions must be restored by offering, especially to young people, real opportunities to build a future in their home country. We commend recent efforts aimed at consolidating regional relations, and welcome Bosnia and Herzegovina's decision to sign the Transport Community Treaty — an important step towards regional integration achieved at the summit on the Western Balkans, which Italy hosted in Trieste last July. All Western Balkans countries should continue working in that direction, which we deem to be essential as they move closer to the European Union.

I will conclude by recalling that our support for Bosnia and Herzegovina is grounded on the respect for its sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity enshrined in the Dayton Peace Agreement. We urge the country to take forward the 5+2 agenda established by the Peace Implementation Council for the closure of the Office of the High Representative. We reiterate our full support for EUFOR Althea and look forward to it strategic review. We stand ready to discuss, in the appropriate forum, a possible reconfiguration of the international presence in Bosnia and Herzegovina as its stability continues to be consolidated and the country moves forward in its European Union integration process.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Mr. Vukašinović (Bosnia and Herzegovina): At the outset let me congratulate you, Sir, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of November, and wish you and your delegation every success.

We welcome Mr. Valentin Inzko, High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, and have taken note of his report on the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina (S/2017/922, annex), covering the period from 22 April to 21 October.

Bosnia and Herzegovina welcomes the adoption of resolution 2384 (2017), extending the mandate of the European Union-led peacekeeping force (EUFOR) Althea for an additional 12 months. It is important to emphasize that Bosnia and Herzegovina, as a host country, has enjoyed respectful and constructive cooperation with EUFOR Althea, particularly in capacity-building and the training of the armed forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which have contributed to strengthening national ownership.

The situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been peaceful and calm for a long period of time, which has been regularly reflected in the reports of EUFOR Althea and in the relevant resolutions of the Security Council. EUFOR Althea is mandated to support the implementation of the military aspects of Peace Agreement and to ensure compliance with annexes 1-A and 2 of the General Framework Peace Agreement. Over the past few years, in order to correspond to the situation on the ground, EUFOR Althea has been reconfigured, while its primary focus has shifted from deterrence and activities in providing a safe and secure environment to the capacity-building and training of the armed forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Bosnia and Herzegovina takes note of the readiness of the European Union (EU) to further calibrate the EUFOR Althea presence, bearing in mind the progress made in its EU integration process and taking into account the security situation on the ground.

In the reporting period, Bosnia and Herzegovina continued vigorous work on implementing the socioeconomic reforms necessary for its integration into the European Union. Bosnia and Herzegovina has further intensified its efforts to ensure the effective implementation of the reform agenda, in accordance with its action plan. Bosnia and Herzegovina has made significant progress in the EU integration process following last year's conclusion of the EU Council, inviting the European Commission to submit an opinion on the merits of Bosnia and Herzegovina's application. Bosnia and Herzegovina's authorities at all levels have coordinated their activities in the multifaceted labour of preparing answers to the questionnaire of the

European Commission. In that regard we reiterate our appreciation to the European Union for its unwavering commitment to Bosnia and Herzegovina's membership in the EU.

One of the most important goals of Bosnia and Herzegovina's foreign policy is the advancement of friendly and constructive cooperation among the countries of the region. The perspective of integration into the European Union continues to drive the transformation and modernization of the region through political and economic reforms. The EU perspective remains the crucial factor not only for regional cooperation but also for the stability of the Western Balkans. Cooperation within framework of the Berlin process, which provides assets for traffic and energy infrastructure, is particularly important to regional development.

The countries of the Western Balkans continue to hold regular meetings at the highest level, which generate a positive political atmosphere. At the latest Western Balkans summit, which took place in Trieste, Italy, on 12 July, leaders of Western Balkans States and high-level EU representatives adopted concrete measures to deepen cooperation in the field of economy, infrastructure and transportation. In that connection, we would like to stress that in September 2017 Bosnia and Herzegovina signed the Transport Community Treaty with the European Union.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has intensified its efforts to strengthen the rule of law in several key areas. In the reporting period, we continued to fulfil our international obligations with regard to countering terrorism, violent extremism and the phenomenon of foreign terrorist fighters. Bosnia and Herzegovina, in accordance with provisions of its amended penal code, continues to process individuals involved in fighting on behalf of terrorist organizations, as well as those facilitating the recruitment of terrorist fighters.

Bosnia and Herzegovina's judicial and security institutions have been implementing our strategy for preventing and combating terrorism. It is important to emphasize that the strategy, alongside security measures, includes preventive activities for deradicalization, undertaken by national stakeholders such as religious communities, educational institutions, civil society organizations and the media.

During the reporting period, Bosnia and Herzegovina's rule of law and security institutions made progress in combating organized crime, corruption and money-laundering. In that regard, we thank the European Union for providing significant support in capacity-building to the Bosnia and Herzegovina Agency for the Prevention of Corruption and the Coordination of the Fight against Corruption.

With respect to the international migrant crisis, the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina have undertaken a set of comprehensive measures, including in the humanitarian and security fields. Bosnia and Herzegovina has implemented its strategy in the field of migration and asylum, as well as a plan of action for the period 2016-2020. This document has specified Bosnia and Herzegovina policy in the field of migration and asylum, in accordance with the highest European and international standards.

As for processing war crimes before domestic courts, we would like to reiterate that fighting impunity at the local level is vital to Bosnia and Herzegovina as a complex and multinational State. In that context, implementing the national strategy for processing war crimes, regardless of the national or religious origin of the perpetrators or the victims, is essential for reconciliation and a long-term stability.

With regard to the economic situation, it is important to stress that Bosnia and Herzegovina's economy, like other economies of the region, has been affected by the global economic slowdown. However, Bosnia and Herzegovina's economy has grown at a solid pace. In the period from January 2016 to January 2017, Bosnia and Herzegovina's economy grew by 2.7 per cent. The current inflation rate is -0.2 per cent, which means that consumer prices have fallen slightly in comparison with the previous year.

It is important to mention that Bosnia and Herzegovina is actively contributing to international peace and security by providing its military and police personnel to United Nations peacekeeping missions. At this moment, we have around 40 personnel serving in United Nations peacekeeping missions worldwide. Bosnia and Herzegovina, as a current member of the Economic and Social Council, supports United Nations activities with regard to the promotion of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and encourages the mutual exchange of experiences in various aspects of the implementation of the Agenda.

Finally, we would like to express the readiness of Bosnia and Herzegovina's authorities to continue their

work to secure a better and prosperous future for its citizens. At same time, we would also like to express gratitude to our international partners for supporting Bosnia and Herzegovina on that path.

The President: I now give the floor to the observer of the European Union.

Ms. Adamson: I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its 28 member States. The candidate countries Turkey, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania, as well as Ukraine, align themselves with this statement.

We thank the Security Council for unanimously adopting resolution 2384 (2017), renewing the mandate of the European Union-led peacekeeping force Althea in Bosnia and Herzegovina for one year. I join other speakers in welcoming High Representative Valentin Inzko back to the Council and in assuring him of the European Union's continued support. I also welcome the Permanent Representative of Bosnia and Herzegovina and thank him for his statement and his kind words about European Union support.

The year 2016 was an important one for the EU perspective of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Following the submission of the membership application by Bosnia and Herzegovina, the EU Council decided to ask the Commission's opinion regarding the membership application. This decision followed the commitment and readiness of Bosnia and Herzegovina to take difficult political decisions in order to deliver on the country's EU integration path, including by ensuring further meaningful progress in the implementation of the reform agenda — an ambitious set of socioeconomic, rule of law and public administration reforms. Together with our international partners, including the international financial institutions, we provided clear incentives to move forward with the necessary reforms aimed at progressively tackling the structural challenges that hold back the country's development. This year was thus expected to be marked by a continuous momentum in the reform process.

However, a year later, the EU regrets that divisive rhetoric rooted in the past and an early preoccupation with upcoming elections have, for most of 2017, slowed down the pace of reforms and affected the political climate. The authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina at all levels of governance, including in both of the country's entities, need to translate commitments into concrete reforms in order to move the country forward on its EU integration path.

The initial implementation of the reform agenda has provided the first steps of structural adjustments to the economy of Bosnia and Herzegovina, but much remains to be done. Delays in the signature of the Transport Community Treaty — belatedly signed last September — and continuing uncertainty around the adoption of excise legislation, to name only two issues, have undermined the possibility for the country to receive further international financial assistance.

Still a year away from the general elections, the European Union continues to urge the authorities to step up the implementation of comprehensive reforms in an inclusive manner, to the benefit of all citizens. Additionally, the European Union calls on the institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina to step up efforts regarding the functioning and the independence of the judiciary, the fight against corruption and organized crime, and the fight against terrorism and the prevention of radicalisation.

Political authorities ought in this respect to refrain from undermining the judiciary of Bosnia and Herzegovina and from commenting on sensitive judicial proceedings, for electoral purposes. It is their responsibility to create a dispassionate environment in which the judiciary can adjudicate effectively and independently. In turn, the highest judicial authorities of the country have to uphold appropriate standards of integrity and independence. The EU also reiterates our calls on all levels of governance in Bosnia and Herzegovina to ensure the effectiveness of the coordination mechanism, including for the purpose of ensuring harmonized and consolidated answers to the Commission's opinion questionnaire. In this respect, Bosnia and Herzegovina needs to continue the work done to answer the questionnaire.

As mentioned, the general elections are 12 months away. While acknowledging that the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina lists Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs as constituent peoples, along with others, the European Union reiterates that the principles of equality of all citizens and non-discrimination shall be fully warranted. The European Union underlines that no legislative or political steps should be taken that would make the implementation of the *Sejdic-Finci* ruling and related rulings more challenging.

In addition to the outstanding recommendations of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) to further improve the electoral framework, the European Union expects Bosnia and Herzegovina to address, within the necessary deadlines, the December 2016 ruling of the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina concerning specific electoral provisions on the Federation House of Peoples. The European Union considers that electoral reforms should be approached in a spirit of consensus and dialogue as an important matter, thereby also calling on Bosnia and Herzegovina to implement OSCE-ODIHR recommendations in order to move the country towards European standards, improving democratic processes for future elections.

The European Union reiterates its unequivocal commitment to the territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a single, united and sovereign country. The European Union will continue to use all available instruments to support Bosnia and Herzegovina's stability and progress. While the overall security situation has remained relatively calm and stable, stability has not been fully entrenched. The European Union welcomes the continued presence of EUFOR's Operation Althea, which retains the capability to contribute to the Bosnia and Herzegovina authorities' deterrence capacity if the situation so requires. In this regard, as part of the overall EU strategy for Bosnia and Herzegovina, the European Union confirms its readiness to continue at this stage the executive military role of Operation Althea to support Bosnia and Herzegovina's authorities in maintaining a safe and secure environment, under a renewed United Nations mandate.

The European Union has invited the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to present a strategic review before the end of the year, as a basis for internal discussions within the EU on options for the future of the Operation, also bearing in mind Bosnia and Herzegovina's progress in its EU integration process and taking into account the security situation on the ground.

As the country's stability continues to strengthen and further progress is achieved in reforms and on the EU path, the European Union looks forward to continuing, in the appropriate forum, the discussion with the international community on the possible reconfiguration of the international presence. In this regard, the European Union calls on the authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina to pursue the reform agenda and to increase its efforts to meet the outstanding objectives and the conditions for the future closure of the Office of the High Representative.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is aiming to advance on its Euro-Atlantic integration, and, hopefully, all obstacles will soon be removed in this regard, which would be an important development for the stability and security of the entire region.

In conclusion, over the two decades during which the Council has been discussing the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, we have witnessed substantial progress in the country in all fields: stability, democracy, security, economic development and EU integration. However, the significant emigration that continues to affect the country and undermine its future is a reminder that citizens demand more changes to improve their daily lives. While it is important to concentrate on the future, we urge the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina also to actively promote reconciliation.

The EU integration process offers an avenue for tackling the deep-rooted structural challenges affecting Bosnia and Herzegovina, but it is for its political leadership to engage with this process and to deliver on the necessary reforms.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Croatia.

Mr. Drobnjak (Croatia): Croatia aligns itself with the statement that has just been delivered by the observer of the European Union (EU). I shall make some additional remarks in my national capacity.

Let me start by welcoming the High Representative, Mr. Valentin Inzko, and thanking him for his report and briefing today.

It has been said often during our debates on this important topic but has to be emphasized once again that as a signatory to the Dayton Peace Agreement, Croatia bears a special responsibility for the stability and well-being of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and it reiterates its unequivocal commitment to the territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a sovereign and united country. Its integration into the European Union and NATO remains our strategic goal.

The Prime Minister of Croatia has visited Bosnia and Herzegovina seven times in the past 12 months.

In addition, we held a joint session of the Government of Croatia and the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina at the beginning of July. This speaks volumes as to how high Bosnia and Herzegovina is on the list of Croatia's priorities.

For Croatia, neighbouring Bosnia and Herzegovina is much more than a trading partner and the 1,000 kilometres of land border that we share. A stable, peaceful and united Bosnia and Herzegovina, based on the genuine institutional equality of its three constituent peoples and all citizens, is a generator of stability in South-East Europe and beyond.

Croatia will continue to support Bosnia and Herzegovina in its EU membership ambition and to extend its full political support and technical assistance and expertise. Advancement in this process is of the highest importance and is not only the best investment in the country's future but also a way to help overcome the difficult burdens of the past.

In this regard, Croatia would like to echo the European Parliament's resolutions on the progress of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2015 and 2016, which state out that the country will not be a successful candidate for EU membership until the appropriate institutional conditions have been established, on the basis of the principles of federalism, decentralization and legitimate representation.

The entry into force of the Stabilization and Association Agreement on 1 June 2015 was a ground-breaking step in the country's process of European integration, providing Bosnia and Herzegovina with a contractual relationship with the EU. Two years later, in spite of the initial implementation of the reform agenda, much remains to be done. At this juncture, providing comprehensive, high-quality answers to all questions contained in the European Commission's opinion questionnaire, essential for presenting Bosnia and Herzegovina with EU candidate country status, seems to be the most important next step.

What Bosnia and Herzegovina needs today is far less inflammatory rhetoric and many more reforms aimed at the strengthening of institutions in general and of the judiciary in particular, fewer divisions and a more consolidated approach to present challenges: less past and more future.

Reform of the election law remains essential, especially against the background of the upcoming parliamentary elections, in 2018. The improvement of the electoral framework should be approached with a sense of urgency, as requested by the decision of the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Ljubić case and its decision on the city of Mostar. It should enable the full implementation of the principle of the equality of the three constituent peoples — Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs — and their right to legitimate representation. That is the basic precondition for faster progress towards a fully functional country that is focused on its future rather than its past.

Croatia is concerned that the ruling coalition may no longer be able to push any legislation, such as the vital amendments to the election law, through the Bosnia and Herzegovina Parliament. That is why we should not shy away from encouraging all political options in Bosnia and Herzegovina to make serious efforts to address this extremely important issue.

Some in Bosnia and Herzegovina expect that the Central Election Commission of Bosnia and Herzegovina will solve the problem. However, the Commission is solely administrative in its scope and nature, and finding solutions to political questions is too great a burden for a body with no adequate legitimacy for that particular purpose. Some are also hoping that the international community might impose a solution, as it has done in the past, but that is not the right way forward. Instead, we are interested in seeing the political ability and administrative capacity of Bosnia and Herzegovina institutions to deal with challenges and come up with appropriate and effective solutions.

While fully cherishing the principle of the independence of the judiciary, we cannot remain silent regarding some of the recent conclusions of the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina. To allow for the possibility of dismissing judges or prosecutors without any prior independent investigation or disciplinary procedure would be tantamount to trampling on the basic principle of the independence and impartiality of judiciary.

The secessionist statements and divisive actions on the part of Republika Srpska politicians are not only endangering the very stability and integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina, but are also derailing the country off the track towards much-needed reforms. In addition, they are moving Bosnia and Herzegovina farther away from its NATO Partnership for Peace path, to which Republika Srpska representatives

committed themselves in 2005, through the Republika Srpska National Assembly conclusions, and to which Bosnia and Herzegovina committed itself in October 2009 by formally requesting activation of the NATO membership action plan.

On the other hand, it is utterly wrong to try to compare the secessionist rhetoric and actions of Republika Srpska leaders and institutions with the Croats' efforts to obtain genuine equality with the two other constituent peoples. The Croats of Bosnia and Herzegovina have so far demonstrated the highest level of support for their country and its Euro-Atlantic ambitions. This fact is often overlooked and certainly not valued enough by those whose duty it is to objectively analyse the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Before concluding, I would like to make a brief comment regarding the High Representative's report, in particular the part titled "Glorification of war criminals". Considering all the words and deeds of Bosnia and Herzegovina's politicians in the past six months, it is surprising, to say the least, that the High Representative chose a particular situation in Mostar as the most significant, and the only one, to be reported under the aforesaid title.

We note with satisfaction the gradual improvement of the economic situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia's main trade partner. Last year, the total commodity exchange between Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina amounted to €1.8 billion. One-fifth of Croatia's overall foreign direct investments is flowing to our neighbour and has already surpassed €1 billion, making Croatia one of the top three investors in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Although the economy of Bosnia and Herzegovina is still falling short of the expectations of its citizens, the positive trends must be followed and expanded. For its part, Croatia will continue with its assistance in this domain as well.

Croatia continues to support the executive mandate of the European Union-led peacekeeping force Althea. Its presence in Bosnia and Herzegovina is equally important for the maintenance of a safe and secure environment, as it is vital for capacity-building and training. However, this mission was not meant to last forever.

In conclusion, we sincerely hope that Bosnia and Herzegovina will find the strength and prudence to overcome the present political impasse and proceed more efficiently on the path of EU and NATO integration. Croatia advocates, and will continue to advocate, for a strong and permanent focus on Bosnia and Herzegovina at the European and international level. It can never be emphasized enough — Bosnia and Herzegovina deserves our full and constant attention, and we should spare no effort to untap its vast, yet underused, potential.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Serbia.

Mr. Milanović (Serbia): Before I begin, I would like to thank the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mr. Valentin Inzko, for his report (S/2017/922, annex).

Regional stability and the development of all-round cooperation with its neighbours have always been among Serbia's foreign policy priorities. A staunch advocate of cooperation with all the countries of the Western Balkans, my country has been very active in promoting these priorities and made every effort to realize concrete projects and lay lasting foundations for a better future of the region. Clearly reflecting its will, Serbia has recognized Bosnia and Herzegovina as a natural, key partner in these endeavours.

We in the region are aware that enlargement may not be among the priorities of the European Union (EU) in the period of consolidation and multiple challenges. We are heartened, however, by the recent message that the continuation of the policy of enlargement to the Western Balkans is a stable process and that EU membership of its countries may take place even before 2025. Serbia will make its own contribution to this process, carry out reforms and promote mutual cooperation. After all, the process is not only in the interest of Serbia, but of Bosnia and Herzegovina, too, and of the entire region.

Conversely, each and every success of Bosnia and Herzegovina is grist for Serbia's mill and gives us cause to believe that we are a step closer to a common future in the European family of nations. A candidate member, Serbia has made considerable progress in the accession process and we expect new chapters to be opened soon. In that context, we are ready to make our experience available to Bosnia and Herzegovina to help it promote its own negotiation process.

Almost 22 years ago to the day, a peace agreement was signed in Dayton, Ohio, ending the tragic conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina. A guarantor of the Dayton Agreement, Serbia believes that the Agreement

continues to provide a basis for peace and stability and that it is of crucial importance for reconciliation. That reconciliation is sometimes hard to come by is evinced by the persistence of different undertones in the region. We must not turn a deaf ear to such discordant messages, which add tension, return us unnecessarily to the past and burden relations between Bosnia and Herzegovina's entities and its constituent peoples. They have a negative ripple effect on the entire region too. Its countries' Governments must be vigilant and make sure that conditions are created for genuine reconciliation. Only in this way shall we be able to ensure progress that will benefit us all.

There is another reason that makes us very motivated to promote cooperation, strengthen relations and build mutual trust with Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as with its entities. Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republika Srpska are home to a large number of Serbs, and we believe that we can help them improve their lives and succeed in their efforts to join the European Union and thereby enjoy the fruits of common EU membership in the near future.

The sovereignty and territorial integrity of States are international standards and consistent respect for them is of paramount importance in international relations. The past that we experienced in the Western Balkans is and should be a constant reminder of their importance for peace, stability and mutual trust and confidence. My country is firmly committed to the preservation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina in accordance with the provisions of the Dayton Agreement.

Today, I shall reiterate what I have already said in my previous statements on this occasion — dialogue and agreement are the safest and best ways to address all outstanding issues between the entities and among the constituent peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This approach has proved its practical validity time and again. If solutions are to be forward-looking and results-oriented, they need to be acceptable and implementable and promote the process of confidence-building in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The questions in respect of which the entities have different views, such as the judiciary or the Election Law, for instance, are, in our opinion, internal questions of Bosnia and Herzegovina. They call for active dialogue within the country, which is the only way to achieve universally acceptable solutions. Otherwise, the floodgates will be open to unilateral acts, misunderstandings and negative messages, to the detriment of the entities and all citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina. All sides should therefore work on building mutual trust and strengthening transparency and, as the first major political undertaking ahead, ensure a smooth holding of the elections next year. After all, transparency and responsibility are the all important building blocks of Bosnia and Herzegovina's common institutions.

High-level dialogue and regular meetings are instrumental in developing all-round bilateral relations and closer cooperation between Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. President of Serbia Mr. Aleksandar Vučić made his first official visit to Sarajevo in early September. Open and constructive, his meetings and other engagements during this visit reflected the need for the two countries to create a new model of relations and to invest additional efforts in promoting economic cooperation and realizing infrastructure projects. Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina Mr. Dragan Čović visited Belgrade recently. In his meetings with President Vučić, it was again assessed that the relations between Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina are of key importance to the preservation of regional peace and stability and for ensuring a better life for all citizens.

The intensification of the dialogue between the two countries is evinced by the preparation of the visit of Bosnia and Herzegovina's Presidency to Belgrade scheduled for December, and the invitation of Ana Brnabić, Prime Minister of Serbia, extended to Denis Zvizdić, Chairman of the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, to a joint meeting of the Government of Serbia and the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, to be held towards the end of 2017.

The promotion of economic cooperation with Bosnia and Herzegovina is of the utmost importance to Serbia and an almost a daily assignment of its Government. Trade exchange between the two countries is in ascendance, and with an investment of over €900 million, Serbia is among the largest investors in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The development of cooperation in the fields of infrastructure, energy, tourism and trade dominates the agendas of the meetings between Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina's officials. Projects that link us to Serbia's to-do list and the participation of third countries in such projects are welcome, especially in the construction of the Belgrade-Sarajevo motorway.

At a time of great challenges facing the world and significant changes taking place in Europe, we must work harder to improve bilateral relations in our region. Drawing upon the traditional bonds of friendship between the people of Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, the two countries should make their relations a role model for good-neighbourliness — all the more so as we continue to be committed to regional development, mutual rapprochement and an ever-quicker march towards the European Union. Open questions from the past should be addressed through dialogue as we proceed to realize our present interests simultaneously.

The meeting rose at 12.20 p.m.